

Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes

March 5, 2020

Present: Marshall Patmos (Chair), April Ferguson, Jean Rudolph, Jeannette Hubert, Perry Sawyer, Dick Schmidt, Mary Bradley (alternate), Kathy Urffer (guest - Connecticut River Conservancy–River Steward), John Snowdon (guest – Conservation District)

The meeting was called to order at 8:35 AM.

The minutes of the February meeting were approved as submitted.

Kathy Urffer of the Connecticut River Conservancy discussed the 40-year relicensing by Great River Hydro of the power dams along the Connecticut River per Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) requirements. While the number one cause of river bank erosion is natural such as flooding, ice out, etc, there is still concern with daily water level changes. Of primary interest is the bank erosion along the Connecticut River caused by daily changes in water level due to hydroelectric operations at Wilder, Bellows Falls and Vernon dams. Vernon dam's 22-mile impoundment is Westmoreland's riverfront. The level increases 2-3 feet while water is stored behind the dams, and drops during its release, approximately 2-11 PM. A 1979 ACOE study identified that level fluctuations undermine some river banks. Now is a critical time in their federal 40-year relicensing to address this matter, as licensee Great River Hydro has not done so. In her recent letter, Kathy Urffer of the Connecticut River Conservancy calls for the impacted riverside towns to pass a resolution on this concern at Town Meeting and submit that resolution the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission; suggested language for the submittal was provided. This suggested letter addresses dam operations, monitoring, and a commitment by Great River Hydro to fund riverbank restoration and related damages. A formal application for relicensing is anticipated to be submitted sometime in July 2020. Kathy has agreed to come to a selectboard meeting with invitations to other interested parties to explain the process and concerns. After much discussion, it was decided that Conservation Commission would draft a letter to the Regulatory Commission indicating the town's interest and concerns with the upcoming relicensing process. Unless the Selectboard would prefer to send a letter directly from them, the letter would be from the Commission indicating the support and endorsement of our selectboard and others. Jeanette will draft a letter using Kathy's draft letter for possible use. Other Commission members may also draft letters for review.

Marshall noted that our budget request of \$650 has been reduced to \$450 by the Selectmen.

Given that Mary might be moving out of town this summer, those present agreed to approve Jean Rudolph as a full member and Mary to serve as an alternate. Our Commission provides for 7 full members and an unlimited number of alternates.

Regarding the annual roadside litter cleanup, the Historical Society has expressed an interest. We hold the bags, vests, assignment lists, etc., now that the Lions Club no longer exists. Volunteers are needed. Earth Day is Wednesday, April 22, and a cleanup would likely be thereafter. The school, 4-H clubs and others will hopefully assist as in the past.

The next WCC meeting will be held at 8:30 AM on Thursday, April 2, 2020 at Town Hall.

Following a motion by Dick and a second by April, the meeting was adjourned at 10:45 AM.

Submitted by Richard Schmidt